



Appeal Decision

Inquiry Held on 15-18 & 29-31 October, 7, 8, 19 & 20 November, 9 December 2024 and 14-16 & 22 January 2025

Visits to the appeal site and related sites made on 17 October 2024, 1, 6 & 18 November 2024 and 17 January 2025

by G D Jones BSc(Hons) DipTP DMS MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 2nd December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/24/3343775

Land east of Junction 8a, M40, Waterstock, Oxford, OX33 1HT

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Greystoke CB Ltd against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P23/S2384/O, dated 29 June 2023, was refused by notice dated 6 November 2023.
 - The development proposed is described as the demolition and clearance of existing buildings and structures to allow for the construction of up to 120,000sqm of Use Class E employment floorspace comprising Research and Development units, Light Industrial units, ancillary offices, ancillary amenity buildings (up to 2,400sqm), Creche (up to 600sqm), Forest School (up to 150sqm), along with new site accesses, internal roads and footpaths, surface and multi storey car parking, open space, landscaping, biodiversity enhancements, drainage features including SUDs and other engineering operations, infrastructure and associated works. All matters of detail reserved.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for outline planning permission with all matters, including access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for future approval. Whilst not formally part of the scheme, I have treated the submitted details relating to these reserved matters as a guide as to how the site might be developed.
3. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised on 12 December 2024 and there were associated changes to the government's Planning Practice Guidance (the PPG). The parties to the Inquiry were given the opportunity to comment on those changes. I note also that a further version of the Framework was published in February after the Inquiry closed. The government has advised that this latter version corrected cross-references from footnotes 7 and 8, and amended part of para 155 to make its intent clear. It was not intended to constitute a change to the policy set out in the December 2024 version.
4. Subsequently, there have been further changes to the PPG. For instance, paragraph 027 'How should the sequential test be applied to planning

applications?’ Although this paragraph had a bearing on my assessment of the associated main issue, as set out below, it has not altered my overall decision. No other subsequent changes to the PPG have had any significant effect on my assessment of or conclusions on any other matter herein. They have not, therefore, affected the outcome of the appeal. Consequently, I have not sought the views of the parties on these changes.

5. There have, nonetheless, been a number of other matters that have been the subject of additional information and further submissions by the main parties following the close of the Inquiry. These are summarised in the Post-Inquiry Documents list, which can be found below, following the record of ‘Appearances’. I have taken all of these into consideration when assessing and determining the appeal. There is also a unilateral undertaking, dated 5 February 2025, made under s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (the UU), which I also took into account when making my decision.

Main Issues

6. Although there was common ground between the parties at the start of the Inquiry that the proposals would be ‘inappropriate development’ in the Green Belt, the appellant’s position and evidence on this matter changed in light of revisions to the Framework. Furthermore, notwithstanding the contents of its eleventh reason for refusal, the Council did not pursue a case in respect to any harm to the significance of the listed building Waterperry House.
7. The final main issues have been adjusted and reordered accordingly as follows:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including in respect to the effect on existing trees;
 - Its effect on the significance of designated heritage assets via their setting, including in respect to Waterstock Conservation Area and listed buildings within it;
 - Whether a sequential test is required and, if so, whether it has been passed and what any consequences might be;
 - The need for the appeal scheme and whether the site is a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to local and national planning policy;
 - The effect of the proposed development on the existing golf course, including in respect to health, well-being and recreation;
 - Its effect on the promotion of sustainable modes of transport;
 - Its effect on highway safety and the efficiency of the highway network;
 - Its effect on biodiversity, including in respect to trees and protected species; and
 - Whether or not the proposals would be ‘inappropriate development’ in the Green Belt, and if so whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances that would be necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Character & Appearance

8. The Council and the appellant (the main parties) have produced assessments of the landscape and visual effects that would result from the appeal scheme. The assessments differ, including in their conclusions. Nonetheless, their witnesses on this matter, along with a further party to the Inquiry, Waterstock Parish Meeting (WPM), all conclude that the proposed development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.
9. It is the extent and nature of the harm that is disputed, with the appellant maintaining that it would fall *well within the threshold of acceptability* relative to national planning policy, including para 187(b) of the Framework. In that latter regard I am mindful that this paragraph does not require the avoidance of harm, but rather that the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside be recognised.
10. From all that I heard, saw and experienced during the appeal process, including during my site visits, the appeal development's effects in these respects would lie most closely to the assessment of the Council's witness on landscape and visual impact. Moreover, notwithstanding the appellant's submissions, the baseline assessment employed by the Council appears reasonable.
11. In coming to this conclusion I have, nonetheless, been mindful that the site is reasonably well contained due mainly to the area's topography and mature planting both within and beyond the site. Consequently, views into the site are constrained. Further planting could be undertaken to help mitigate the harm to the character and appearance of the area.
12. The proposed development would, however, be apparent within the site and elsewhere even once additional planting had had opportunity to mature. Aspects of the golf-related use of the site are not entirely in character with the rural attributes of the area. However, overall the site's use and appearance sit very comfortably with the surrounding countryside character. This is due, at least in part, to the site's non-intensive management, the quality of planting, and the limited scale and quantum of built form, which help allow the existing site to integrate reasonably positively within the local landscape. In striking contrast, due chiefly to its proposed scale and nature, the landscape and visual effects of the appeal development would be marked, sitting uneasily with its predominantly rural context.
13. I have come to this view bearing in mind, amongst other things, that the developed site would be experienced as people move through the area rather than purely from, for example, the static viewpoints identified in the evidence. It would, for instance, be experienced by users of the public right of way network that crosses the site and which extends to the north connecting to the well-used Oxfordshire Way from which the site is visible from along some sections between Waterperry and Waterstock. The developed site would also be apparent from the two vehicular access points to the south, as shown in the illustrative material.
14. The assessment of the landscape effects of the appeal development made on behalf of the appellant have been influenced by the Landscape Character Assessment for the Local Plan 2033, November 2017 (the 2017 LCA). Commissioned by the Council, the 2017 LCA was intended to support and inform the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035, December 2020 (the Local Plan). Its

methodology, it says, 'has been derived from aspects' of a number of documents, including 'Guidelines for Visual and Landscape Impact Assessment 3', 2013 (GLVIA).

15. The 2017 LCA refers to it being an 'update' to a 1998 version (the 1998 LCA). Indeed, it seems likely that the 1998 LCA informed the 2017 LCA bearing in mind notable similarities in approach between the two documents. For instance, the landscape character types and areas of both are very similar. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine how the GLVIA could have significantly influenced the approach to identifying the landscape character types and areas in the 2017 LCA given that the 1998 LCA predates the GLVIA and the other guidance referred to as having informed the methodology of the 2017 LCA.
16. The appellant's approach employs the 'Amenity landscape' landscape type of the 2017 LCA. For the reasons outlined above, the landscape types of the 2017 LCA may not be entirely consistent with the methodology of the GLVIA. This seems all the more likely given that the most recent Landscape Character Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, September 2024 by LUC (the 2024 LCA), which was commissioned by the Council as part of its local plan review, takes a different approach to that of the 1998 and 2017 LCAs.
17. I recognise that the 2024 LCA has not been fully scrutinised via the plan-making process in the manner that the 2017 LCA is likely to have been. Nonetheless, it was consulted upon and appears to be consistent with the GLVIA and to take a more up to date approach to landscape character assessment compared to its predecessors. For instance, in contrast to the 2017 LCA, it does not employ land use to identify landscape type. Notably, although neither of the main parties' landscape witnesses were aware of the 2024 LCA at the time their written evidence was prepared or when they gave oral evidence, the evidence for the Council appears to be broadly consistent with the approach of the 2024 LCA.
18. Moreover, the appellant's evidence considers the whole site as 'Amenity landscape', which describes golf courses as 'intensively managed and suburban'. This may be appropriate for some golf courses, including some of those I visited in the wider area as part of my site visits. Yet the appeal site at large does not look or feel suburban. It does not contain any residential or hotel buildings. The built form is low-density and of modest height. While the driving range is lit, there is no significant lighting for driveways and paths. There is little by way of ornamental planting or paving, and the bays of the car park are not marked. While the course is clearly well-maintained, based on the evidence and my observations, that does not equate to it being 'intensively managed'.
19. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the site, to the west, does not resemble a golf course. Notwithstanding, past tipping at the site, it now has a broadly agricultural appearance and the evidence indicates that haymaking takes place, at least on part of it. This is likely to represent a very marked improvement on the scene compared to the year 2000 when extensive tipping is likely to have been taking place. It was at that time that the golf course was described in the Council's 'Waterstock Conservation Area – a character study' document as an *alien intrusion into the wider landscape*. That cannot be sensibly alleged today. Indeed, overall, the site has a low-key rural character and appearance when experienced both within it and from beyond it.

20. In my view, the appeal site and its immediate landscape is representative of the 'Thame Middle Vale' landscape character area of the 2024 LCA. It seems most likely that the golf course is not expressly mentioned in the 'Thame Middle Vale' landscape character area because it is, at least broadly, consistent with the character of this landscape character area, notwithstanding the proximity of the highway network, structures and services, particularly to the south and west.
21. For these reasons, the appellant's landscape baseline is not as representative as that of the Council's. In my view, the appellant's evidence also underplays the landscape's sensitivity, including an overstatement of the influence of the highway infrastructure referred to above, including in terms of noise and lighting. Overall, this has led to an under-valuing of the site and its contribution to the locality, as well as to understate the effect that the development would have on the character and appearance of the area in both landscape and visual terms. In contrast, the methodology, assessment and conclusions of the Council's witness appear reasonable and appropriate to the current site and its context as well as to the likely effects of the appeal development allowing for mitigation.
22. Having found that the appeal development's effects would lie most closely to the assessment of the Council's witness in this regard, I have concluded that it would have a significantly harmful impact on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would conflict, in that respect, with Policies ENV1 (Landscape and Countryside), DES1 (Delivering High Quality Development) and DES2 (Enhancing Local Character) of the Local Plan.

Heritage Assets

23. It is common ground between the main parties that the appeal development would cause harm to the significance of the Waterstock Conservation Area (the Conservation Area), and Waterstock House and Bow Bridge, which are both listed at grade II, via its effects on the settings of each of these heritage assets. Both main parties identify that the resulting harm would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework.
24. The Council additionally maintains that the development would also cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the grade II listed buildings of Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge via its effect on their respective settings. In contrast, the appellant has concluded that there would be no such harm to either of these listed buildings.
25. There are no designated heritage assets within the appeal site. Although there are other heritage assets in the vicinity, the main parties have concluded that their significance would not be harmed by the development. For the reasons they have identified, I have also found that there would be no such harm arising from the appeal scheme. I focus, therefore, on the Conservation Area and the four listed buildings identified above, and deal with each in turn.
26. Waterstock village lies at the heart of **the Conservation Area**. Encircling the village core, the rest of the Conservation Area is mainly comprised of farm buildings, paddocks, agricultural land, wooded areas and the River Thame, which collectively provide a comfortable transition to and from the rural landscape beyond. The listed buildings of Waterstock House, Bow Bridge, Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge are all located within the Conservation Area.

27. The appeal site lies outside the Conservation Area. Nonetheless, the two sit closely together around the northeastern tip of the site.
28. In my view, the significance of the Conservation Area derives primarily from the well-preserved layout of the south Oxfordshire rural settlement of medieval origin, its rich collection of 17th and 18th century buildings, including the listed buildings referred to above, and its relationship with the Waterstock Estate.
29. Of the 'important views in, out & around' identified in the 'Waterstock Conservation Area – a character study' document none include the appeal site. Nonetheless, the site was historically part of the agricultural hinterland of Waterstock and is known to have been part of the wider agricultural landholdings of the Waterstock Estate in the mid-19th century and probably much earlier. Although the land was tenanted, the site is likely to have a historical functional association with the village. In this way, the setting of the Conservation Area, including the appeal site, makes a notable contribution to its significance. The use and character of the site have changed over time, most notably through tipping and the introduction of the golf use and the associated development. Nonetheless, as outlined in the *Character & Appearance* subsection above, it has retained a reasonably open and rural feel.
30. Although it was once the service wing of a late 18th century manor, **Waterstock House** is now a dwelling in its own right. The rest of the manor house was demolished during the 1950s prior to it being listed in 1963. Its significance derives principally from its individual architectural quality and interest, its status as a surviving evidential feature of the greater manor house and its associated historic role and function.
31. As with the wider Conservation Area, the setting of Waterstock House contributes to its special interest due to the functional association with the surrounding countryside, including the appeal site having been part of the Waterstock Estate. There are no designed views from Waterstock House towards the site. Yet there is strong intervisibility between Waterstock House and part of the appeal site via a vista through this part of the Conservation Area, roughly westward of Waterstock House, notwithstanding the presence of a menage and equine paraphernalia close to the listed building. The view from the Bridleway adjacent to the site, via this vista, is significant as there are few views of Waterstock House from the public domain.
32. The remaining three listed buildings are located near to each other in the river corridor and have group value. **Bow Bridge** is an 18th century bridge. Its significance derives in part from the quality of its design and materials. As a long standing part of the river crossing, linking Waterstock with Waterperry to the north, its significance also derives from this historical function and the related association with the grade II* Waterperry House.
33. Having regard to these considerations, its attractive, largely unspoilt, rural setting also makes an important contribution to its significance. The appeal site contributes to that setting bearing in mind the historical associations referred to above and as it forms a discernible part of the rural backdrop to Bow Bridge when viewed from the north.
34. The significance of **Waterstock Mill** derives from its architectural and historic interest as a good example of a traditional watermill, which is thought to date from

- the 16th or 17th century. The evidence indicates that it ceased to operate as a mill in 1832, yet it formed part of the Waterstock Estate until 1954. Its longstanding associations with the Waterstock Estate also contribute to its historic interest.
35. Like Bow Bridge it has an attractive, largely unspoilt, riverside, rural setting. This context and the appearance of Waterstock Mill contribute to its significance as a listed building, particularly in terms of assisting the legibility of its historic use. Unlike Bow Bridge, there are no visual links between the site and Waterstock Mill. Nonetheless, the appeal site forms part of this listed building's setting due to its proximity and its generally rural character and appearance, combined with the historical associations between the two via the Waterstock Estate.
36. **Waterstock Mill Bridge**'s significance derives from its historic and architectural interest as an 18th century bridge associated with Waterstock Mill and in terms of its role, alongside Bow Bridge, forming the river crossing linking Waterstock and Waterperry.
37. Its context is largely the same as that of Waterstock Mill. It also has no visual links with the appeal site. The site forms part of Waterstock Mill Bridge's setting, similar to Waterstock Mill and Bow Bridge, because of its proximity and its generally rural character and appearance, combined with the historical associations, which includes its role connecting the Waterstock Estate with Waterperry.
38. These four listed buildings each make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
39. The indicative material shows that the proposed development would be set back from the northern boundary with additional planting indicated, including at its closest point to the Conservation Area and to the four listed buildings. The detail of the scheme would be controlled at the reserved matters stage, including landscaping and siting. Nonetheless, a large employment campus of the type proposed would result in significant urbanisation and loss of green space. Indeed, the proposed development would significantly alter and harm the character and appearance of the appeal site, as discussed in the preceding subsection.
40. The effects of urbanisation would be unlikely to be limited to the built form. I appreciate that the evidence indicates that the appeal development would not, subject to controls, lead to any significant effects on living conditions, for instance in terms of the effects of noise on local residents. That is not to say, however, that the character of the area would necessarily be unaffected. Indeed, given the scale and nature of the development it seems likely that use of the appeal site, for instance due to the effects of lighting, movement and noise, would be felt and lead to an erosion of rural character.
41. Overall, the appeal scheme would significantly undermine the appreciation of the village as a historic rural settlement reliant on agriculture. Additionally, it would erode the wider historic relations between the site and all five of the heritage assets in question.
42. In summary, therefore, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the significance of the grade II listed buildings of Waterstock House, Bow Bridge, Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge, as well as on that of the Conservation Area, via its effect on the setting of each. Consequently, in that regard, it would be

contrary to Local Plan Policies ENV6 (Historic Environment), ENV7 (Listed Buildings) and ENV8 (Conservation Areas).

43. In each case, bearing in mind that these heritage assets would not be directly physically affected by the development, the harm would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework. For the reasons outlined above, including intervisibility, the effect on the significance of Waterstock House and Bow Bridge would be considerable, to the middle of the less than substantial range. Although they are more visually contained, given their group value with Bow Bridge the effect on Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge would also be to the middle of the less than substantial range. Due in part to proximity and intervisibility, combined with the identified harm to the four listed buildings, the effect on the significance of the Conservation Area would also be considerable, to the middle of the less than substantial range.
44. Having regard to para 215 of the Framework, I return to the relative weight of the identified harm compared to the public benefits of the appeal scheme in the *Other Considerations and the Planning Balance* subsection below.

Sequential Test

45. In respect to flood risk, the Framework is clear that the sequential approach and tests should take account of all sources when assessing whether to permit new development. Nonetheless, it identifies an exception *in situations where a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates that no built development within the site boundary, including access or escape routes, land raising or other potentially vulnerable elements, would be located on an area that would be at risk of flooding from any source, now and in the future (having regard to potential changes in flood risk).*
46. In this regard, in relation to planning applications, the PPG says that a *proportionate approach should be taken. Where a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates clearly that the proposed layout, design, and mitigation measures would ensure that occupiers and users would remain safe from current and future surface water flood risk for the lifetime of the development (therefore addressing the risks identified e.g. by Environment Agency flood risk mapping), without increasing flood risk elsewhere, then the sequential test need not be applied.*
47. There are no outstanding objections to the appeal scheme from either the Lead Local Flood Authority or the Environment Agency in light of the flood risk assessment and associated site-specific material submitted on behalf of the appellant. Taking a proportionate approach and allowing for mitigation that could be secured via planning conditions, this material demonstrates that *occupiers and users would remain safe from current and future surface water flood risk for the lifetime of the development* in the terms of the PPG. Accordingly, there is no requirement for the sequential test in this case having regard to para 175 of the Framework.
48. In summary, therefore, a sequential test is not required. Consequently, in that regard, there would be no harm arising from the development or conflict with either the development plan or the Framework.

Location & Need

49. While related to the assessment of the 'need' for the appeal scheme, a conclusion regarding the site's current overall suitability for the proposed development is a function of a number of other considerations, including the wider main issues. Consequently, this subsection focuses primarily on need and the scheme's relationship with the Council's strategy for the location of development of this nature. The overall conclusion regarding whether the site is a suitable location for the proposed development, therefore, necessarily comes towards the end of my decision letter within the *Other Considerations and the Planning Balance* subsection.
50. Section 3 of the Local Plan sets out the Council's spatial strategy. Amongst other things it includes a focus on delivering housing and employment at 'Science Vale'. Science Vale is described in the Local Plan as *an area in Southern Oxfordshire, crossing the border of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse ... concentrated around the three centres for science and technology at Harwell Campus, Culham Science Centre, and Milton Park, but is supported by a number of important settlements including Didcot, Wantage and Grove.*
51. Local Plan Policy STRAT1 sets out 'the overall strategy'. Amongst other things, it states that *Proposals for development in South Oxfordshire ... should be consistent with the overall strategy of ... focusing major new development in Science Vale ... so that this area can play an enhanced role in providing homes, jobs and services with improved transport connectivity.*
52. Policies STRAT2 (South Oxfordshire Housing and Employment Requirements) and EMP1 (The Amount and Distribution of New Employment Land) of the Local Plan provide further detail regarding how the spatial strategy will be implemented. Policy STRAT2 includes a minimum employment land requirement for the Plan period, 2011 to 2035, of 39.1ha to be delivered in accordance with the spatial strategy set out in Policy STRAT1. This is echoed in Policy EMP1, which also sets out where employment land will be located as well as the net amount of employment supply in each of the identified locations, which total 47.94ha.
53. The appellant recognises that the appeal scheme would breach Local Plan Policies STRAT1, STRAT2 and EMP1 as the site is not within Science Vale or another of the allocated sites. In addition to these Policies, the first refusal reason alleges conflict with Local Plan Policy STRAT4 (Strategic Development).
54. Local Plan Policy STRAT4 is concerned in large part with the form of development within the site itself and how this relates to the site and its surroundings. Nonetheless, it also relates to the principle of development. For instance, its first part states that *new development will be provided within strategic allocations in order to deliver the scale and distribution of development set out in Policies STRAT1 and STRAT2.* On this basis the proposed development would also conflict with Policy STRAT4 because the site is not allocated in the Local Plan. The key point though is that the scheme is at odds with the development plan's spatial strategy due to its location.
55. It is common ground between the main parties that there is policy support, nationally and locally, for Science and Technology based development, including in paras 85 to 87 of the Framework. There is a national imperative to boost the UK's

economic growth and productivity, with the science and technology sector playing an important part in achieving that ambition. Indeed, the Modern Industrial Strategy White Paper published earlier this year emphasises the important role to be played by Oxford, the Oxford area and the Oxford Cambridge Growth Corridor. The Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire 2023, for instance, also recognises the unique social and economic features of the County that are of national and international significance.

56. The appellant has been clear regarding the specific role and nature of the appeal proposal. In summary, its features would include intensive / active management for all businesses on-site, a focus on advanced manufacturing as well as offices or labs, a 'staircase' of different building size and types to allow businesses to grow and remain on-site, and a quality campus style setting with a range of accessible shared facilities.
57. I recognise the important role that 'clusters' of complementary and symbiotic uses can play in the success of Science and Technology development. This is reflected in and enabled by the Local Plan, notably via its employment allocations and the Science Vale concept which extends into the neighbouring Vale of White Horse District. These have regard to existing and future development and uses.
58. The appeal development, particularly due to the size of the site, has the potential to deliver such a cluster. Nonetheless, notwithstanding its proximity to the strategic road network, compared to Science and Technology sites that are planned for via the Local Plan and in the greater Science Vale, the appeal site appears to be less well connected to existing synergistic uses, including learning institutions and hospitals. I also note that the appeal scheme itself does not include learning institution / hospital uses.
59. Notwithstanding the appellant's submissions, while they may not have entirely the same characteristics as the appeal site, including its proximity to the motorway network, the allocations of the Local Plan and of the Vale of White Horse District for Science and Technology development currently have capacity. Some of the allocated sites face delivery challenges. Some have constraints that will limit the type of development that is delivered.
60. Nonetheless, at least some of them, appear capable of accommodating flexible mid-tech space and development of the nature, kind and scale envisaged by the appellant for its site. In coming to this view I have taken into account that Culham Science Centre is the chosen location for the AI Growth zone and that this might lead to reduce capacity there. If so, there still appears to be available capacity elsewhere, notably at Harwell Campus located in the Vale of White Horse portion of Science Vale.
61. The relevant development plan allocations, including Harwell Campus, also have reasonable transport links, for instance to support distribution associated with manufacturing. Indeed, although the appeal site is well served by bus services, which would be enhanced were the development to proceed, as outlined in the *Transport & Highways* sub-section below, it is relatively poorly served for pedestrian and cycle access compared to allocated sites. Moreover, Harwell, for instance, also appears capable of accommodating 'cluster' type development, comparable to that envisaged by the appellant at the appeal site.

62. A case has been made for the existence of greater need than is provided for in the development plan and as identified in the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Employment Land Needs Assessment, January 2024 (the ELNA), which was produced to support the local plan review process. A study produced for Cherwell District and Oxford City Councils, the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment, December 2022 (the HENA) takes a broader, County-wide view of development needs. Compared to the ELNA it produced a much higher assessment of need for South Oxfordshire.
63. Nonetheless, the Council's evidence credibly explains the likely reasons why the ELNA and the HENA documents produced different assessments of need. In terms of methodological differences, the greatest variance appears to be due to the use of different plot ratio. Nonetheless, the approach taken on behalf of the Council does appear to be more appropriate and robust as it acknowledges that plot ratios for office stock are likely to vary, contrasting between higher density in town centres and in campus type development.
64. The Council has also taken into account potential shortcomings in the ELNA. For instance, the approach to churn. Yet, as illustrated in the Council's evidence, even if the ELNA had included a margin to provide choice and flexibility of supply along the lines of the HENA, it would add proportionally little to the forecast land requirement. Similar adjustments in respect to the replacement of losses, for example due to conversion of office space to housing, indicate that the need identified in the development plan would still be met.
65. While it uses a labour demand scenario, the ELNA also appears to be appropriately forward looking, employing economic forecasting consistent with industry practice. While it focuses primarily on the Council's District and the Vale of White Horse, it also took into account the Oxford and West Oxfordshire local authorities, the Functional Economic Market Area. It assesses quantitative and qualitative need in a comprehensive manner and has due regard to identification of land for development that would be attractive to businesses of national or international importance, including Culham Science Centre, Milton Park and Harwell Campus, and appears to be consistent with the PPG.
66. Nonetheless, it must also be acknowledged that there is presently significant doubt regarding how the local plan review process will conclude given the current position taken by the examining Inspectors. Moreover, the evidence clearly indicates that housing need, applying the current standard method, is higher than what is planned for in the Local Plan. This is something that should be properly taken into account when considering need. Greater housing need would translate into a need to plan for more jobs.
67. The Council's submissions regarding the housing requirement of the Local Plan relative to the latest standard method figure of some 1,234 homes per year do not appear to properly compare like with like. This is because its calculations include that part of the Local Plan housing requirement intended to meet housing need of Oxford rather than purely that part of the requirement for South Oxfordshire's needs. Consequently, in this respect, the Council's evidence appears to significantly overstate the extent to which the Local Plan provides for the District's current housing needs. The appellant's figures appear much more reliable in this particular regard. The development would also help respond to regional and national need beyond that of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

68. To conclude on the need for the appeal scheme, for the reasons outlined above, the Local Plan makes reasonable provision for development of the type proposed. Moreover, the Local Plan does not envisage this kind of development in this location such that it would be at odds with the development strategy for the area, contrary to Local Plan Policies STRAT1, STRAT2, STRAT4 and EMP1. Nonetheless, there is likely to be significant additional need for employment development, particularly to go alongside South Oxfordshire's additional housing need. As this need is not currently addressed in the Local Plan, bearing in mind the degree of uncertainty over how and when such need will be provided for, this matter weighs in favour of the appeal development.

Golf

69. Were the appeal scheme to proceed as envisaged by the appellant, it would lead to the loss of the golf facilities from the site. These include 5 of the course's 18 holes, the driving range, its car park, clubhouse and maintenance shed. It is common ground between the main parties that the scheme conflicts with Policy CF4 of the Local Plan.
70. Policy CF4 seeks to protect, maintain and where possible enhance existing open space, sport and recreation, play facilities and land to ensure their continued contribution to the health and well-being /of visitors and residents. Development that would result in the loss of such facilities is permitted by the Policy in the event that one of three criteria are met. The appellant does not seek to demonstrate compliance with any of these criteria.
71. In contrast to Policy CF4, the appellant maintains that the appeal development would not breach Local Plan Policy CF1, which seeks to safeguard essential community facilities. Nonetheless, the outcome of assessing the proposed development against Policy CF1 would be no different to that in respect of Policy CF4. Consequently, I have not found it necessary to take a view on Policy CF1 because it makes no difference to the outcome of the appeal.
72. That part of the golf course that stands outside the appeal site would not be directly affected by the development. In theory, it could continue as a golfing facility were the appeal development to proceed. The lease on that land to the east of Waterstock Lane has still a long period to run and I am advised that there is no legal impediment to some form of golf continuing there.
73. However, no evidence has been submitted to confirm that golfing would continue on what would remain of the existing golf course or that it is capable of continuing in practical terms. For instance, there is no clear information about how it might be achieved in practice, for example in the form of a 9-hole course. Nor is there any detail to demonstrate that a safe and otherwise acceptable vehicular access could be formed to serve any such facility. Nor are there details of how supporting facilities, such as parking, a club house and a maintenance building, might be accommodated as part of such a golfing facility. Consequently, very little weight can be given to the prospect of a retained golfing facility here.
74. I note that the evidence of the Council's witness on this matter indicates, on the basis of his 'regular golfer demand index' that, even with the entire loss of Waterstock Golf Course, South Oxfordshire would still enjoy a level of provision

that is better than the national average. However, there is no substantiated evidence to say that the national average is a suitable benchmark.

75. I also note his evidence that no golf course in South Oxfordshire, other than Caversham, operates any sort of waiting list in order to obtain membership and play. While this may be an indicator of demand or need for facilities in the area, it does not necessarily follow that there is no unmet need/demand. Having said that, the Council's Leisure Facilities Assessment & Strategy 2023-2041 (the LFAS) states that *there were no issues with capacity, availability, cost or security of tenure raised by England Golf as part of this study and it is expected that future demand can be met within existing golf course facilities / club capacities*.
76. There appear to be methodological issues with some aspects of the Council witness's evidence. Notably, the 10, 20 and 30 minutes isochrones that were employed relate to distance from Waterstock Golf Course rather than from where people live. Consequently, this evidence may not give a full or fully accurate picture of the facilities available. Indeed, it seems likely that it does not. The LFAS states that *the majority of residents in South Oxfordshire are within a 30-minute drive-time of golf facilities*.
77. Nonetheless, the wider evidence indicates that Waterstock Golf Course performs an important role for a number of reasons. In contrast to other golf courses in the area, it is open to non-members who can turn up and play. While other driving range facilities are available elsewhere, it has 22 of the 40 publicly accessible driving ranges within South Oxfordshire. It also appears to play an important role locally in the 'golfer journey'. I also heard from interested parties regarding the importance of the facilities at Waterstock Golf Course to them for a range of compelling reasons.
78. Significantly and notwithstanding its wider contents as touched upon above, the LFAS states as a 'key action' in respect to Waterstock Golf Course: *Protect - This facility should be retained or enhanced as part of redevelopment unless an assessment has demonstrated that there is an excess of provision and they are surplus to requirements or clear evidence supports their relocation*. The wider evidence does not demonstrate an excess of provision.
79. Moreover, in terms of golf facilities in South Oxfordshire and what provision is required to meet needs and address issues, the associated Leisure Facilities Assessment Report, January 2024, concludes: *Need to maintain the current level of provision and capacity for general community use to meet current and future needs of the district. Reduction of overall capacity will have an impact on meeting future population growth of the district. (PROTECT)*.
80. For the reasons outlined above, therefore, the likely effect that the proposed development would have on golfing facilities in the area would be likely to be significantly harmful, including in respect to health, well-being and recreation. This, along with the associated conflict with Policy CF4 of the Local Plan, is an important consideration that weighs against the appeal scheme.

Transport & Highways

81. The sixth and seventh main issues, concerning sustainable transport and highway safety and efficiency, are both dealt with under this subheading as they overlap to some extent.

82. In respect to the promotion of sustainable modes of transport the site is located on the existing bus network. That network, among other things, connects Oxford, Thame and Aylesbury, where the appellant considers that most of the developed site's workforce would be drawn. Bus services also link to the rail network via Oxford, Haddenham and Thame and Aylesbury.
83. Existing bus routes could be reasonably re-routed through the developed site. This could be facilitated as part of the detailed site layout process. It is also proposed to improve existing bus services and facilities, including via the provision of real time information units on bus stops. Although primarily intended to support the proposed development, these enhancements to services and facilities would also be available to the wider community to their benefit.
84. In these, foregoing, respects the proposals are consistent with para 109 d) of the Framework and Local Plan Policy TRANS2 i). Moreover, the completed scheme would offer a choice of transport modes consistent with Framework para 110. It would, though, be a somewhat limited choice for reasons that are outlined below.
85. A number of other initiatives are proposed that are intended to support sustainable modes of transport associated with the development. These include subsidies / financial support for the purchase of travel passes, a car sharing scheme, preferential parking and other incentives for car sharers. There would also be financial incentives for cyclists, cycle storage, and cloakroom/changing and washing facilities. Control over on-site car parking at the reserved matters stage could also support the sustainable transport strategy.
86. Nonetheless, other than for very nearby residents, it seems likely that users of the proposed development would not access the site on foot or by cycle. This is due to a combination of factors, including the travel distances that are likely to be involved and the nature of the pedestrian and cycle infrastructure in the area surrounding the site. For instance, the more strategic highway network is unlikely to be attractive to many pedestrians / cyclists due to the volume, mix and speed of traffic. The right of way network, while appealing to leisure users, is likely to be unattractive to commuters due to ground conditions and lighting.
87. Local Plan Policy TRANS2 iii) refers to ensuring *new development is designed to encourage walking and cycling, not only within the development, but also to nearby facilities, employment and public transport hubs*. The internal design of the scheme could be laid out with this intention. Yet, for the foregoing reasons, it seems unlikely this would accomplish much in terms of achieving significant pedestrian and cycle movements to and from the site, including safe and convenient access for all users of the highway network or at least the perception of such conditions for pedestrians / cyclists. In these respects, there would be a tension with Local Plan Policy TRANS5 1) i).
88. The range of on-site uses proposed, including the creche and Forest School, may result in linked trips and/or limit the need to travel off-site. Nonetheless, there can be no guarantee that those who would work at or regularly visit the site would use the creche and Forest School in preference to other facilities, perhaps closer to home.
89. Nearby access to the motorway network would also be likely to reduce goods vehicle journeys away from the national strategic road network. This would be

likely to be of some benefit in terms of sustainable transport. It would also be likely to reduce the prospect of goods vehicles using local roads. This would have the potential to be beneficial in terms of traffic impact and highway safety, matters that are considered below.

90. For the foregoing reasons, therefore, while the proposed development would offer benefits in terms of making use of and enhancing bus services for the benefit of users of the development and the wider community, wider alternative transport options would be limited, particularly in respect to active modes of transport.
91. Turning to the proposed development's effect on highway safety and the efficiency of the highway network, it is important to keep in mind that the appeal planning application is for outline permission with all matters reserved, including access. I am also mindful that the Council's case, with the support of the County Council in its role as local highway authority, in this regard does not go as far as to seek to demonstrate that the proposed development would unacceptably effect highway safety and the efficiency of the highway network. Rather, its case is that the appellant has failed to demonstrate that it would not. In contrast, National Highways has no outstanding objections, albeit that there remain details to resolve.
92. The Framework sets out at para 116 that *development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.*
93. During the course of the Inquiry it became clear that, subject to careful design and appropriate mitigation, which are matters that could be properly controlled at the reserved matters stage were planning permission to be granted, safe access arrangements could be secured as part of the development. For reasons touched on above, while I have strong reservations regarding how attractive such access arrangements and the wider highway network would be to pedestrians and cyclists, there is good reason to believe that a safe environment could be achieved.
94. Similarly, the evidence at large does not demonstrate that the proposed development would have a severe impact on the road network in the terms of the Framework. Indeed, while I have reservations over both main parties' approaches to trip generation, for the wider reasons identified by the appellant, it seems most likely that, subject to mitigation, the appeal scheme need not lead to any such 'severe' impact.
95. Therefore, subject to appropriate controls and mitigation, there is good reason to believe that the proposed development need not have an unacceptable effect on highway safety and the efficiency of the highway network. On this basis, in these respects, it would accord with Policies TRANS2 (Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility), TRANS4 (Transport Assessments, Transport Statements and Travel Plans), TRANS5 (Consideration of Development Proposals) and STRAT4 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity

96. The statutory requirement to deliver a biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10% does not apply in this case due to the timing of the appeal planning application. Nonetheless, the appellant does propose to deliver 10% BNG. How that would be achieved, including scope for off-site delivery, has been challenged by the Council

- and other parties. Nonetheless, with the statutory requirement becoming the norm for a wide range of development, there are likely to be more abundant and varied opportunities to deliver off-site BNG provision to support development of this type.
97. Moreover, the statutory requirement establishes a mechanism to secure 10% BNG. For qualifying proposals, the grant of planning permission is subject to the condition that development may not commence until a biodiversity gain plan has been approved demonstrating how the objective of delivering at least a 10% BNG will be achieved. In the case of the appeal scheme, I see no reason why this approach could not be reasonably replicated in a suitably worded planning condition.
98. While this approach would not guarantee the delivery of the BNG, it would prevent development pending identification of how 10% BNG would be delivered. If a solution could not be found, the development could not lawfully proceed. As a matter of principle, therefore, there is no good reason to resist the proposed development on the basis that BNG would not be secured. In its own right, 10% BNG, including off-site provision, would represent a benefit that weighs in favour of allowing the appeal. Nonetheless, there are other site specific biodiversity considerations that must also be taken into account.
99. In respect to priority species, the Council's evidence at the Inquiry focused, in part, on the Skylark. This was in the context of the Skylark being on the 'Red list' of 'Birds of Conservation Concern' in relation to 'regularly occurring birds in the UK'. I also note that in 2021 Oxford Ornithological Society advised, in respect to the Skylark, that *it makes sense why this formerly widespread species is now considered to be at the highest level of conservation concern*.
100. The site has been surveyed on behalf of the appellant by Falco Ecology and Aspect Ecology. Mr Marriner of the River Thame Conservation Trust, who appeared as a witness for WPM, also provided his recordings of species counts for the site. I do not doubt the accuracy of those surveys produced for the appellant. Nonetheless, if species are not recorded it does not necessarily follow that they are absent or that the land in question does not provide their habitat.
101. Notwithstanding the findings of the most recent Aspect Ecology surveys, the evidence at large indicates the past presence of Skylark at the appeal site and that they exhibit high levels of breeding site fidelity. Overall, there is good reason to believe that the site provides breeding habitat for Skylark. Indeed, the Environmental Statement (the ES) for the appeal scheme concluded that the effects of Skylark habitat loss would be 'major adverse'.
102. The ES adds that *impacts are likely to be greatest in relation to Skylark given that this species requires large open fields for breeding which will be almost entirely lost under the Proposed Development*. Mitigation is proposed, including measures to avoid potential active nests during the construction phase. Nonetheless, when considering 'mitigation for birds', the ES recognises that *the loss of large open grassland habitat will result in an adverse effect on Skylark*. Given that the Skylark is a priority species and 'Red-listed', the resulting adverse effect on Skylark would amount to a significant harm.
103. Turning to Great Crested Newts (GCN), the site contains a man-made irrigation pond. The pond supports GCN, a priority and European protected species, and is a priority habitat. While all matters of detail are reserved for future consideration,

the illustrative material indicates that there would be construction in the vicinity of the pond. There is, therefore, at least a prospect that this habitat would be affected by the development. Indeed, the indicative layout shows a building projecting into the pond, with the appellant's evidence referring to it being on 'stilts'. Beyond the construction stage, potential sources of disturbance may include from people, lighting and noise.

104. I recognise that mitigation is proposed and that there is likely to be scope for habitat enhancement. Nonetheless, it does seem likely that GCN would be affected by development works such that a derogation licence would be likely to be required. Three tests apply to the assessment of this likelihood, including that *there is no satisfactory alternative*.
105. In respect to European Protected Species Mitigation Licensing, Natural England advise, amongst other things, that *you are expected to have considered all reasonable alternative solutions when developing your proposal(s) and to have suitable grounds (and evidence) for discounting each against the proposed solution to meet the need*. It adds that *alternatives can include different locations, routes, designs and construction methods*. The appellant has not, in my view, adequately assessed alternatives in relation to GCN. Consequently, I cannot have confidence that Natural England would issue a licence.
106. The third part of Local Plan Policy ENV2 contains three similar tests for development likely to result in loss, deterioration or harm to priority habitats and species, including in terms of alternatives. On this basis there would be tension with this Policy.
107. The floodplain grazing marsh within the site is also a priority habitat. The illustrative material indicates that the intention is that the development would not be located within it. The evidence indicates that the floodplain grazing marsh also receives water from sources other than fluvial flooding. Nonetheless, there is a reasonable prospect that a drainage strategy could be devised to ensure that water is not diverted away from the marsh such that the hydrology of this habitat need not be detrimentally affected.
108. In addition to GCN, the development has the potential to affect the pond referred to above as a priority habitat. The pond is not intended to form part of the surface water drainage scheme serving the appeal scheme. If there were concerns regarding more direct effects of the development, such as from the buildings on stilts referred to above, it is likely that these could be resolved at the reserved matters stage.
109. At the time of the Inquiry roughly half of the appeal site sat within the Thame Valley Conservation Target Area (CTA). It was one of a series of CTAs forming the Ecological Network for the County. The CTA were intended to provide the best opportunities for targeted conservation action. Para 7.16 of the Local Plan states that *development proposals that would affect the integrity of these networks will be resisted or discouraged*.
110. On 12 November 2025, the CTAs were superseded by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) as Oxfordshire's ecological network in the planning process. While the policy considerations related to this matter are broadly

unaltered as a consequence of this change, the extent of the appeal site covered by the ecological network designation has been extended by some 15%.

111. For the reasons outlined above, particularly in respect to Skylark, the appeal development would harm priority habitat and priority species within the LNRS. Consequently, it would undermine the integrity of the LNRS as an ecological network.
112. Therefore, there would be site specific considerations, particularly in respect to Skylark, resulting from the development that would lead to harmful effects in regard to biodiversity. Consequently, in those regards, the appeal development would not accord with Policies ENV2 (Biodiversity - Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species) of the Local Plan. There is, however, no apparent conflict with Local Plan Policy ENV4 (Watercourses) subject to suitable mitigation.
113. There is, though, a mechanism available to ensure that the development would not proceed without delivering 10% BNG in some form. Such BNG would represent a benefit were it to be forthcoming, consistent in that regard with Policies ENV3 (Biodiversity) and DES1 of the Local Plan.
114. There remains uncertainty, nonetheless, regarding where and in what form such BNG might be delivered, including in terms of how the specific biodiversity harm identified above might be mitigated, if at all. I return to these matters, including in terms of weight, in the *Other Considerations and the Planning Balance* subsection.

Green Belt

115. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. As outlined in the *Heritage Assets* subsection above, the appeal development would result in *less than substantial harm* to the significance of a number of designated heritage assets. While this is not a Green Belt matter as such, the outcome of the balancing exercise required under para 215 of the Framework has the potential to influence the consideration of Green Belt matters. Consequently, I return to this topic as part of the following *Other Considerations and the Planning Balance* subsection.

Other Considerations and the Planning Balance

Planning Obligations

116. In the event that the appeal were to be allowed and planning permission granted and implemented the UU would secure:
- Payments towards:
 - The improvement of bus services in the area of the site, including increasing the frequency of and maintenance of existing bus services serving the site;
 - The provision of real time information units at bus stops in the vicinity of the site or other locations that would provide a similar benefit;
 - The cost of monitoring the Framework Travel Plan for the appeal development;
 - The cost of monitoring the User Travel Plan per business units on-site, and
 - The provision of a Bond to guarantee aspects of some of the foregoing.
117. The planning obligations in the UU are to Oxford County Council. The County Council has submitted a detailed statement (the CIL Statement), which addresses

the application of statutory requirements to the planning obligations within the UU and also sets out the relevant planning policy support / justification. I have considered the UU in light of Regulation 122 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) and Government policy and guidance on the use of planning obligations. Having done so, I am satisfied that they would be required by and accord with the policies set out in the CIL Statement. Overall, I am also satisfied that all of those obligations are directly related to the appeal development, and in each case are fairly and reasonably related to it and necessary to make it acceptable in planning terms.

Heritage Balance

118. The appeal development would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the grade II listed buildings of Waterstock House, Bow Bridge, Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge, and to that of the Conservation Area. In these circumstances Framework para 215 requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
119. Para 212 of the Framework states that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets irrespective of whether the harm would be substantial or less than substantial. This weight applies to all designated heritage assets - the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.
120. While not their principal source, the setting of the five designated heritage assets concerned, make a considerable contribution to the significance of each. While that contribution may be modest in comparison to the other factors that contribute to their significance, it is nonetheless valuable in each case. As listed buildings at grade II, Waterstock House, Bow Bridge, Waterstock Mill and Waterstock Mill Bridge are each of special interest.
121. The proposed development would bring a number of public benefits as identified in the evidence. As outlined in the *Location & Need* subsection above, there is identified housing need and associated employment development need, which are not planned for in the Local Plan. There is also uncertainty over when the development plan process will address that need. The development would also help respond to regional and national need beyond that of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. These circumstances, including the consequences of not meeting need, weigh significantly in favour of the appeal development.
122. I am mindful that the appellant considers that there is further weight in favour of allowing the appeal associated with what is said to be a lack of alternative sites for the appeal development. However, as identified above, at least some of the sites allocated in the Local Plan do appear capable of delivering comparable development to that proposed. Consequently, this matter carries limited weight.
123. The economic investment / output, employment and wages associated with the development weigh significantly in favour of the appeal development. There would be similar, albeit more modest temporary benefits associated with the construction phase that attract moderate weight.
124. There is the prospect of improved highway safety at Junction 8a of the M40 as part of the access proposals. Access is a reserved matter such that there remains some uncertainty regarding the final design and, consequently, the extent of any associated benefit. Nonetheless, as a decision making tool, I have assumed that

such beneficial works would be secured. They attract moderate positive weight notwithstanding the uncertainty.

125. The appeal scheme would deliver improved bus services and facilities. Although they are primarily intended to support the proposed development, they would be available to the wider community. Consequently, they would represent a public benefit in their own right that attracts moderate weight.
126. As outlined in the *Biodiversity* subsection above, the development's likely effects on biodiversity are varied. For the purposes of making my decision, as a decision-making tool, I have assumed that there would be environmental benefits, notably via the intended 10% BNG. This carries moderate weight.
127. The totality of the public benefits would be very weighty. However, they are not collectively sufficient to outbalance the combined less than substantial harm to the significance of the four listed buildings given that such harm should be given considerable importance and weight and bearing in mind the importance and special interest of each of these heritage assets. Of course, the identified less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area would also weigh against the public benefits. This too should be given considerable importance and weight. Therefore, the combined harm to these heritage assets would firmly outweigh the public benefits in the terms of para 215 of the Framework.
128. In coming to this conclusion I have taken into account, amongst other things, that there currently appears to be land available in Science Vale that could accommodate development comparable to that proposed, and that, while the need for employment development discussed above is likely to be significant, any shortfall is likely to be temporary notwithstanding the uncertainties associated with the local plan review process. In contrast, the harm to the significance of each of these important heritage assets would be of a far more permanent nature.

Whether Inappropriate Development in the Green Belt

129. Green Belt policy in the Framework changed during the course of the Inquiry and was further clarified after the Inquiry closed. In light of these changes, the case was made by the appellant that the site qualifies as Grey Belt, which in turn would affect whether or not the appeal scheme would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the terms of the Framework.
130. However, the definition of Grey Belt expressly excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in Framework footnote 7, including designated heritage assets, would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. Given my conclusions in the preceding *Heritage Balance* subsection, this is the case in this instance. Consequently, the appeal site is not Grey Belt in the terms of the Framework.
131. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the exceptions of Framework para 154 applies or where it accords with its para 155. In this case, none of the criteria of para 154 are met and, because the site does not qualify as Grey Belt, para 155 cannot be engaged. Consequently, the appeal scheme would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the terms of the Framework.

Other Matters

132. The evidence refers to a number of other appeal decisions regarding a range of proposed development types at a variety of locations, including in South Oxfordshire and in other local planning authority areas. Those in other areas would have been the subject of different development plan policies compared to those before me. Moreover, I am not familiar with the full circumstances of any of those cases. While I am mindful of the importance of consistency in appeal decision-making, it is also important that each decision is made on its individual merits. So, although I have taken all of the other appeal decisions into account, I have assessed and determined this appeal on the basis of the evidence before me in the relevant policy context. None have had a significant bearing on the outcome of the appeal.
133. WPM and other interested parties have raised a wide range of matters during the appeal and planning application processes, both in writing and in person at the Inquiry. While I have taken them into account, as they do not alter the outcome of the Appeal, I have not found it necessary to discuss them any further herein.

Conclusion on Very Special Circumstances

134. For the reasons outlined above, the appeal scheme would be 'inappropriate development' in the Green Belt. Such development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
135. The Framework also states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness, when considering any planning application. Given the scale and mass of the proposed development compared to the comparatively modest development currently present, the appeal scheme would very significantly reduce openness within the site, spatially and visually. While the site makes up only a very small proportion of the Green Belt at large, the development would, nonetheless, harm the openness of the Green Belt.
136. When undertaking the balancing exercise under para 215 of the Framework I concluded that the public benefits of the appeal scheme would not outweigh the collective 'less than substantial harm' that would be caused to the significance of the five designated heritage assets concerned. The proposed development would result in further harm as identified above, including in respect to the character and appearance of the area, to the Green Belt and to golfing facilities. It follows, therefore, that the collective harm would not be clearly outweighed by the considerations that weigh in favour of the scheme.
137. Therefore, the 'very special circumstances' required by the Framework do not exist. Consequently, the appeal scheme would conflict with Policy STRAT6 (Green Belt) of the Local Plan.

Overall Planning Balance

138. The Local Plan does not plan for current housing need and associated employment provision. There is uncertainty over when the development plan process will address such need. In the circumstances, some of the most important

development plan policies for determining the appeal are out of date in the terms of the Framework including in relation to employment provision and the spatial strategy more generally.

139. Nonetheless, given the foregoing conclusions regarding the Framework para 215 heritage asset and very special circumstances balancing exercises, when undertaking the s38(6) planning balance there is evidently insufficient weight in favour of the appeal development to outweigh the identified collective harm.
140. Although I have not done so, had I concluded that the public benefits would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage assets, then the appeal scheme would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the so-called 'tilted balance' of Framework para 11 would have applied.
141. However, even in those circumstances, the collective harm to the significance of the five heritage assets, to the character and appearance of the area, and in relation to golfing facilities would be very substantial. While the combined weight of the benefits would be considerable, it would, nonetheless, be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the adverse impacts that would result from the development. For the avoidance of any doubt, as a decision-making device when undertaking this balancing exercise, I have not given any weight to the biodiversity harm identified above, while I have treated the potential BNG as a benefit.
142. Accordingly, the appeal scheme would not be sustainable development in the terms of the Framework. Nor would the site be a suitable location for the proposed development relative to the fourth main issue.

Conclusion

143. The Local Plan does not fully plan for current housing need and associated employment provision. There is uncertainty over when the development plan process will address such need. In the circumstances, some of the most important development plan policies for determining the appeal are out of date, including in relation to employment provision and the spatial strategy more generally.
144. In several notable respects the proposed scheme would contribute positively to sustainable development objectives as set out in the Framework, particularly in terms of responding to need that is not addressed in the Local Plan, and securing economic investment / output, employment and wages. However, for the reasons outlined above, it would not be sustainable development in the terms of the Framework such that there is no presumption in its favour.
145. Moreover, it would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no material considerations that have led me to conclude that the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Indeed, even if the appellant's best position on the weight currently carried by the policies of the development plan were to be adopted, there are significant material considerations, notably in respect to the identified harm to designated heritage assets, the character and appearance of the area and to golfing facilities, that indicate planning permission should not be granted.
146. For the foregoing reasons, therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

G D Jones
INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

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They called

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Instructed by Henry Manisty on behalf of
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She called¹

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Landscape, Biodiversity and Heritage

Michael Tyce

Green Belt, Waste, Need/Economic Benefits
and Planning

Arabella Whelan

Equestrian

Prof Roger Heath-Brown

Biodiversity

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Biodiversity

David Fraser

Biodiversity

Nick Moon

Public Rights of Way & Landscape

Rob Arthur

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Ben Piper

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Dave Youens

Golf

Nick Edmundson

Golf

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Susie Edmondson

Resident

Freddie van Mierlo

Constituency MP

Cllr Tim Bearder

Ward District and County Councillor

Cllr Chris Hill

Tiddington with Albury Parish Council

David Mancey

Resident

Sarah Godowski

Resident

Dr John Wilkinson

Resident

Wendy Walker

Member of the Golf Club

Margaret Allan

Member of the Golf Club

Troth Wells

Local equestrian

Rosalind Portman

Resident

Michael Haffey

Resident

Tamsin Woods

Garsington Riding for the Disabled Association

continued ...

¹ Although he produced a proof of evidence on Financial Viability, Perry Stock was not called to give evidence. Similarly, Robert Flint did not participate in the Need/Economic Benefits Roundtable session, instead Waterstock Parish Meeting was represented by Mr Tyce. Their written evidence and supporting documents have nonetheless been taken into account in my decision

Jane Harper	Resident
Prof Alistair Buchan	Resident
Stephen Hanks	Golf Club Senior Captain and Resident
Edward Dyson	Resident

CORE DOCUMENTS & INQUIRY DOCUMENTS

Core and Inquiry Documents can be found at the Council's website here:

<https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=ApplicationDetails&REF=P23/S2384/O#exactline>

POST-INQUIRY DOCUMENTS

Ref	Party	Correspondence & topic	Date	Attachments
1	Appellant	Email from Pegasus re WMS on Growth Corridor Strategy	06/02/2025	Written Ministerial Statement - Growth Corridor Strategy made on 29/01/2025
				Press Release from Chancellor Rachel Reeves published 28/01/2025
2	WPM	Email with WPM party response to the WMS	09/02/2025	
3	Council	Email response from Council with attachment	10/02/2025	Appendix 1 - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament
4	Appellant	Email from Pegasus re publication of PPG relating Green Belt	05/03/2025	
5	WPM	Email with WPM response to the PPG	07/03/2025	
6	Appellant	Email from Pegasus re Government's Modern Industrial Strategy and Related Action Plan on Advanced Manufacturing	04/08/2025	Note on Modern Industrial Strategy by Stephen Nicol dated 22/07/2025
7	WPM	Email with WPM response to the note from Mr Nicol attached	12/08/2025	Response from Waterstock Parish Meeting to Stephen Nicol's note (dated 12/08/2025)
8	Council	Email with Council response to the note from Mr Nicol attached	29/08/2025	Council response to note prepared by Mr Nicol 29/08/2025 re Modern Industrial Strategy
9	Appellant	Email from Pegasus regarding emerging Local Plan (recommended to be withdrawn)	16/10/2025	
10	Council	Email with 1st response from Council with attachment	20/10/2025	Letter from Council re emerging Local Plan dated 20/10/2025
				Appendix 1 - Letter from Local Plan Examining Inspectors dated 26/09/2025
11	Appellant	Email with Pegasus 1st response	20/10/2025	
12	WPM	Email with WPM response to Pegasus email of 16/10/2025	20/10/2025	
13	Council	Email with Council 2nd response and attachments	24/10/2025	Appendix 1 - Council letter to LP Examining Inspectors dated 20/10/2025
				Appendix 2 - Oxford Cambridge Arc Prospectus

14	WPM	WPM email re press release relating to Crown Estates/Harwell with web link	22/10/2025	https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/news/the-crown-estate-acquires-harwell-east-site
15	Appellant	Email from Pegasus responding to both the WPM on Crown Estates/Harwell acquisition and response to the Council 2nd response on the emerging Local Plan	30/10/2025	
16	Council	Email from Council re Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Oxfordshire	12/11/2025	Appendix 1 - About the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
17	WPM	1st Email from WPM re the LNRS	12/11/2025	
18	WPM	2nd Email from WPM re the LNRS and weblink	14/11/2025	https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-unveils-ambitious-local-nature-recovery-strategy/#:~:text=The%20LNRS%20is%20designed%20to,a%20set%20of%20targeted%20actions
19	Appellant	Email from Pegasus with response from Alistair Baxter on the LNRS	20/11/2025	